

Tulane's 'Trauma!' course offers new approach to online learning



Sandy Rosenthal, founder of the grassroots group Levees.org, will teach a "mini-course" through Tulane University this fall as part of a new massive open online course, or MOOC, about trauma. (Photo courtesy of Levees.org) (Photo courtesy of Levees.org)



By **Jed Lipinski, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune**

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Sandy Rosenthal, the founder of local storm protection advocacy group [Levees.org](#), will teach a free online "mini-course" at [Tulane University](#) this fall as part of an innovative new approach to massive open online courses, or MOOCs.

The mini-course, offered through Tulane's Traumatology Institute, will focus on how Rosenthal created her grassroots organization, which helped to hold the Army Corps of Engineers accountable for levee breaches during Hurricane Katrina.

The Levees.org mini-course is part of a MOOC called Trauma! that will be offered this fall through Tulane. Charles Figley, director of the Traumatology Institute, said the Trauma! MOOC is structured differently than most MOOCs, which have drawn criticism for their high drop-out rates.

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While most MOOCs are simply online versions of classroom-style classes, Trauma! consists of 10 one-week mini-courses, or what Figley terms "knowledge blocks." Four of the courses are required, but students are allowed to choose the remaining six.

"We're taking a Netflix approach," he said. "All the knowledge blocks will be listed online with information about each one. Popular courses may be listed as 'Trending,' others as 'Recommended for You.'"

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In another deviation from the typical MOOC format, students at Tulane are allowed to take the course for credit. Every week for 75 minutes, the students will meet in a classroom on campus to discuss the course material, Figley said.

Rosenthal's course, tentatively titled "Levees.org: Innovations and Community Response to Trauma," is one of more than 40 courses offered through the Trauma! MOOC. Figley compiled many of the course listings with help from contributors to the "Encyclopedia of Trauma: An Interdisciplinary Guide," which he edited.

In the Levees.org course, Rosenthal said that students "will gain an understanding of how and why the levees in New Orleans failed during Hurricane Katrina." They will also learn "how a nobody like me could arm myself with tools to prevail against wealthy corporations who were trying to shut me down."

All the mini-courses in Trauma! will include readings and lectures by experts in trauma psychology, along with links to videos and an online video game called Traumaquest, developed specifically for the course, Figley said.

Figley expects around 50 Tulane students and 5,000 total students around the world to enroll in the course this fall.

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